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SUBJECT: COORDINATOR FOR AFGHANISTAN QUINN MEETINGS WITH  
EUROPEAN COMMISSION, COUNCIL

Classified By: USEU PolOff Sarah Groen for reasons 1.5(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On January 20, Coordinator for Afghanistan Ambassador Maureen Quinn and a joint State/Department of Defense team met with European Council Director General Robert Cooper and European Commission South Asia Head of Unit Julian Wilson. Cooper said he is markedly more optimistic about the situation in Afghanistan now than he was six months ago, primarily because of the successful presidential elections and signs of more resolve from the government of Afghanistan. The meeting with Wilson focused more on the specifics of EU participation in Afghanistan, with Wilson saying the EU has set aside 8 million in funding for the parliamentary elections in May, and that any additional funding will have to be diverted from other projects. Ambassador Quinn thanked the EU for its assistance to Afghanistan, and asked for follow-through on commitments and additional assistance on alternative livelihoods. She also suggested that the EU consider providing development experts who could be stationed with provincial reconstruction teams. END SUMMARY.

COOPER: BIG PICTURE IMPROVING

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12. (C) Cooper told Ambassador Quinn that he is more positive about the situation in Afghanistan now than he was six months ago. He said he had originally thought Karzai "a nice guy" but unable to govern effectively; he now sees signs of stiffening resolve from the Afghan government (such as Karzai's formation of a new cabinet mostly devoid of warlords). It is good that Ismail Khan and Fahim Khan have been moved on, Cooper said. He thought "we should pay attention to (former interior minister and presidential runner-up Yunus) Qanooni," because "the idea of having an opposition is not a bad one." Qanooni is a natural politician, Cooper said, adding that he is "always suspicious of a government of national unity."

13. (C) "Everything goes well except drugs, basically," was Cooper's take on the current situation. Ambassador Quinn agreed that the narcotics problem was a "big black cloud," but pointed out that the issue is front and center and that progress is being made. She said every effort is being made to give the counter-narcotics effort an "Afghan face." This is an area, Quinn said, where the EU could make a big contribution, by helping develop alternative livelihoods (an area in which it has expertise).

14. (C) Ambassador Quinn mentioned she had previously met the Commission's Julian Wilson and EU Special Representative in Afghanistan Francesc Vendrell in New York. Cooper expressed confidence in Vendrell, saying that while he (Cooper) used to be more involved in Afghanistan--he participated in the Bonn conference--he now defers to Vendrell, and finds him "very acute." (Note: Vendrell's six-month tenure is up for renewal in the next month. End Note.)

15. (C) Cooper asked about the current status of Operation Enduring Freedom. Ambassador Quinn said our commitment to Operation Enduring Freedom is still strong, noting that the effort has shifted from counter-terrorism to counter-insurgency, with OEF forces staying in one place and building relationships with local leaders. A more robust effort by Pakistan along the border has also made a big difference. Both elements have led to successes in recent months. Cooper said he thought a successful counter-insurgency effort was all about having a credible government that can maintain order.

16. (C) Ambassador Quinn highlighted the success stories of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and said we will be encouraging more European participation, ideally with the contribution of EU development experts to the PRTs. She also pointed out that after the parliamentary elections, the Bonn process winds down, and asked if Cooper had any thoughts on what might come afterwards. "It's clear Afghanistan will still need a considerable amount of outside support," he said.

17. (C) Toward the end of the meeting, Cooper seemed to reach a main message he wanted to communicate. "If you want to make an impact (in Afghanistan), there is no substitute for military involvement," he acknowledged. But the consequence of American military power in Afghanistan is that the EU can

feel sidelined. "If you can find ways of recognizing that the EU is an important player in Afghanistan, the more likely support is to continue," he said. He said the level of overall EU interest in Afghanistan is waning a bit, as progress is made there and as other parts of the world become more urgent hotspots; Afghanistan now has "less visibility" (although certain key member states such as France, Germany and the UK are still very focused on the country). Cooper suggested that when President Bush and President Barroso meet in February, President Bush should recognize the role of the European Commission in Afghanistan. In response, Ambassador Quinn reaffirmed that "we do recognize and value the EU commitment" to Afghanistan, and discussed key projects where we would welcome further EU contributions: roads, alternative livelihoods and other counter-narcotics assistance, and provision of civilian personnel for the PRTs.

COMMISSION: ELECTION FUNDING AND LONG-TERM STRATEGY  
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18. (C) While Ambassador Quinn's discussion with Cooper covered the big picture, her meeting with Julian Wilson of the European Commission focused more on specifics of EU involvement in Afghanistan, including updates on election funding, the EU Kabul-Jalalabad road project, and potential shifts in Commission funding over the next several years.

19. (C) On election funding, Wilson told us the Commission has currently set aside 8 million to support the Parliamentary elections in May. This is down from the 21 million the Commission provided for the presidential elections. Asked why, Wilson pointed out that the initial 21 million had included funding for voter registration in advance of the presidential elections, a one-time task. He assured us, however, that if it comes to a "bun fight" around the donors table, where donors have to dig deeper into their pockets to meet higher election costs, the EU will be at that table because it is important to them politically. Wilson pointed out that if the Commission is to contribute more than 8 million to elections, the money will have to be diverted from other projects.

110. (C) Discussing more long-range plans for assistance to the region, Wilson said that the Commission's new 7-year funding plan (which would cover 2007-2013) would raise the overall amount of money allotted to South and Central Asia, but that there may be a strategic shift in funding priorities, possibly leading to a decrease in funding for Afghanistan. He said the Commission currently provides assistance funds in the amount of 200 million annually to Afghanistan and 50 million to Pakistan; in the next seven-year plan, that amount could rise to 400 million annually for both countries, with 150 million going to Afghanistan.

111. (C) This re-alignment fits, Wilson said, with the EU's conception of Afghanistan as a "symptom" of wider problems in that part of the world, problems which must be addressed in countries such as Pakistan if Afghanistan is to be successful. He said the EU is interested in taking a "longer-term, coherent" approach to the region, which would put Afghanistan in the context of neighbors to the north as well as to the east. He suggested that in the long run, there might be an internal reorganization at the European Commission that would group together offices dealing with South and Central Asian countries all the way from Iran to Bangladesh. Wilson stressed that the new funding plan is still under the discussion, and that the decisions on how to prioritize the funding are made "far above my pay grade." The 2007-2013 financial plan will probably be completed later this year.

112. (C) Wilson raised the issue of the timetable for parliamentary elections. Ambassador Quinn said that Karzai and the Government of Afghanistan are starting to make key decisions which need to happen before elections. Our sense, she told him, is that elections can happen by late May or early June at the latest, and that it is important to stick to this original timeframe so that the attention of the international community does not shift elsewhere. Wilson noted that personnel support for the elections could also be a factor; many UN personnel are reaching the ends of their contracts, and are choosing not to renew. This may be due to the fatigue of working in a stressful area, and also to the fact that world attention has to some extent shifted elsewhere, and other crises are now more immediate.

113. (C) Finally, Ambassador Quinn touched briefly on the issue of Commission support for the Italian judicial sector project (which Wilson said he would look into), and asked about the status of the Commission-funded Kabul-Jalalabad road. Commission Afghanistan Desk Officer Jonathan Hatwell, who visited Afghanistan and checked on the road project in November 2004, said that the project has largely recovered from a June 2004 attack that killed several employees of a

Chinese company working on the EU project. Extra security was put in place, and he believes the work is now back on track, progressing at a rate of 10-12 kilometers per month.

114. (U) Ambassador Quinn cleared this cable.

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